

# The Perils of Referendums

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# The Perils of Referendums: A Review

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## ABSTRACT

This article reviews the Constitution Unit's *Interim Report of the Working Group on Unification Referendums on the Island of Ireland*. After placing referendums in the context of political history and theory, the paper critically analyses the report's discussion of when a referendum is likely to be called. Following this, the paper reviews the Constitution Unit's analysis of the rules regulating these referendums. It is concluded that the report provides an exemplary starting point for future discussions. There are gaps, however. For example, the report says virtually nothing about online campaigning. This is especially puzzling as research has shown that online campaigning (through social media) contributed to disinformation in previous referendums in Britain. Both Ireland and the United Kingdom should follow the lead of Estonia, Iceland, Latvia and Portugal, and introduce restrictions on social media campaigning—or, explain why not.

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## INTRODUCTION

‘Panic isn’t required; preparation for all eventualities is’. These are the words of Alex Kane, a former Ulster Unionist Party communications director and now ‘a prominent columnist in the *Belfast Telegraph*’.<sup>1</sup> Since the 2016 Brexit referendum—in which a majority in Northern Ireland voted to stay in the EU, while the overall majority of voters in the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union—a poll by Lord Ashcroft found a small majority of 51 percent of the voters in Northern Ireland in favour of unification.<sup>2</sup> Not a massive upsurge, but still an indication that all do well in planning for ‘all eventualities’.

Mr Kane’s succinct assessment is cited in the modestly titled *Interim Report* of the equally inconspicuous sounding *Working Group on Unification Referendums on the Island of Ireland*.<sup>3</sup> Behind the inobtrusive title is a group of what can only be described as the good and the great of all academic discussion pertaining to Northern Ireland. Under the chairmanship of Alan Renwick, of the Constitution Unit, at UCL, this report is the most comprehensive analysis of all the issues concerning possible referendums on unification (or reunification) of the two jurisdictions on the island of Ireland.

Among the members of the stellar cast of academic lawyers and political scientists are Oran Doyle (a constitutional law professor at Trinity College Dublin), Cathy Gormley-Heenan (a political science professor at Ulster University) and Professor Brendan O’Leary, an Irish political scientist who has plied his trade for many years at the University of Pennsylvania, and who has recently written the authoritative account of the politics of Northern Ireland.<sup>4</sup> The other members of the group are equally distinguished.

In matters related to Northern Ireland, it is customary to look for even the smallest signs of bias. Certainly, many of the contributors to this report have previously expressed views—even strong ones. That is to be expected. But the conclusions of the report are serious, sombre and occasionally even solemn.

<sup>1</sup> Alex Kane, ‘Unionists don’t need to panic about the border...however, they do need to be prepared’, *Belfast Telegraph*, 15 February 2019.

<sup>2</sup> See: <https://lordashcroftpolls.com/2019/09/my-northern-ireland-survey-finds-the-union-on-a-knife-edge/> (accessed 19 February 2021).

<sup>3</sup> Alan Renwick *et al.*, *Interim Report of the Working Group on Unification Referendums on the Island of Ireland*, London Constitution Unit, UCL (October 2020). Available at: [https://www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit/sites/constitution-unit/files/wgurii\\_interim\\_report\\_nov\\_2020.pdf](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit/sites/constitution-unit/files/wgurii_interim_report_nov_2020.pdf) (5 March 2021).

<sup>4</sup> Brendan O’Leary, *A treatise on Northern Ireland: consociation and confederation. From antagonism to accommodation?* (III Vols. Vol. III. Oxford, 2019).

From an academic point of view, this report is testament to the validity of Max Weber's famous conclusion that while the scholar might be directed by his or her preferences in the choice of object, the conclusions can be 'valid for all who *seek* the truth'.<sup>5</sup>

This article is a review of the *Interim Report*. While it looks more generally at the questions pertaining to the right to hold Irish unification votes, the main focus will be on the regulation of referendums. Thus, in reviewing each of the sections, the present note will compare and contrast the findings and recommendations with norms and practices elsewhere.

## REFERENDUMS ON UNIFICATION

The enthusiasm for—and the opposition against—referendums on national issues has waxed and waned since methods of direct democracy were first used to decide on issues concerning national self-determination, the drawing of borders and sovereignty. As this review is written for an academic or scholarly audience it is de rigueur to cite some of the historical precedents, if only in passing.

Depending on the definition, votes on unification and sovereignty have been held as far back as the fourteenth century. Then, votes were held in present-day France to escape the domination of the Holy Roman Empire. For example, in 1307, Lyonnais voted for independence in the first instance of what we might call a referendum.<sup>6</sup> Under similar circumstances, male property-owning citizens in Burgundy voted in 1527 to nullify the Treaty of Madrid, according to which the territory would be ceded to Spain. The vote was a tactical masterstroke by the French King Francis I, who—having read Erasmus of Rotterdam—thought that he could undo the accord he had signed when he was in a weaker position.<sup>7</sup>

The proponents of letting the people decide included an impressive array of some of the greatest political theorists of history, which featured the likes

<sup>5</sup> Max Weber, 'Objectivity in the social sciences', in Edward A. Shils and Henry A. Finch (eds), *Max Weber on the methodology of the social sciences* (Glencoe, IL, 1949), 84. Italics in the original.

<sup>6</sup> Johannes Mattern, *The employment of the plebiscite in the determination of sovereignty* (Baltimore MD, 1921), 37.

<sup>7</sup> Sarah Wambaugh, *The doctrine of self-determination: a study of the theory and practice of plebiscites* (Vol. I. Oxford, 1919), xxiii.

of John Locke, Hugo Grotius and Jean-Jacques Rousseau.<sup>8</sup> However, it was not until the eighteenth century that this form of democratic consultation began to resemble what we today would consider to be a referendum in the proper sense of the word.

Modern democracy took a quantum leap forward with the American Revolution. All free men were entitled to vote, and it was recognised that the right to govern should not be limited to a small elite group. Perhaps not surprisingly, this had an impact on the use of direct democracy. The first referendum in America was held in 1788 in Rhode Island, when voters were consulted on whether they wanted to give up their independence and join the newly minted United States. As it happened, they voted ‘no’, but—in what some will find to be an interesting parallel to the Irish referendums on, respectively, the Nice Treaty in 2001 and the Lisbon Treaty in 2008—they were eventually forced to join the Federation.<sup>9</sup>

These early experiences continued in France, though here with a clearer ideological commitment to the sovereignty of the people as originally developed by Rousseau, ‘[the] revolution proclaimed as the fundamental principle of all government the principle of popular sovereignty’.<sup>10</sup>

Italian unification was accomplished through plebiscites between the late 1840s and the early 1870s, and at the time, all major powers (including Russia and Prussia) were in principle in favour of resolving border issues through referendums. For example, the contentious issue of the border between Denmark and Germany was intended to be resolved through a plebiscite. Though Otto von Bismarck, having been victorious on the battlefield, was in no great hurry to implement the Treaty of Prague, the peace agreement which mandated a vote on the matter.

This was to be a pattern followed many times after that, telling us that a border dispute is to be settled by a referendum, but the stronger power prevaricates, and the weaker power is not in a position to demand that the promised referendum is held. Such is what happened in the aforementioned case of Schleswig Holstein. The same happened in Kashmir despite UN Security Council Resolution 47, which stated that ‘a plebiscite will be

<sup>8</sup> Matt Qvortrup, ‘A brief history of self-determination referendums before 1920’, *Ethnopolitics* 14 (5) (2015), 547–54: 549.

<sup>9</sup> See: Ruth Wallis Herndon and John E. Murray, ‘An economic interpretation of Rhode Island’s 1788 Referendum on the Constitution’, in Joshua Hall and Marcus Witcher (eds), *Public choice analyses of American economic history* (Vol. 1, Berlin, 2018), 117–35.

<sup>10</sup> Mattern, *The employment of the plebiscite*, 24.

held when it shall be found by the Commission that the cease-fire and truce arrangements set forth in Parts I and II of the Commission's resolution of 13 August 1948 [are met]'.<sup>11</sup> That was 70 years ago at the time of writing. To date no referendum has been held. Kashmir is not the only example of this. A similar example is Western Sahara where a dispute over who should be allowed vote (and therefore who would win) has prevented the UN Security Council from dealing with it. Interestingly Ireland was credited with leading the successful block by the elected ten against the five permanent members of the UN Security Council to settle in Morocco's favour in 2002.<sup>12</sup>

### DECIDING WHEN TO CALL A REFERENDUM

The reason for drawing these historical facts to the reader's attention is not merely to provide information that is of intrinsic interest to scholars but because the legal requirement to hold a referendum is one which may be subject to short—or long-term—political calculation, as it stands. As the authors of the report write, the starting point for any discussion about a referendum is the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, which explicitly states that

[The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland] shall exercise the power [to hold a referendum] if at any time it appears likely to him that a majority of those voting would express a wish that Northern Ireland should cease to be part of the United Kingdom and form part of a united Ireland.<sup>13</sup>

Such referendums may not take place within seven years of each other.

The authors of the *Interim Report* acknowledge that the prospects of a referendum may appear remote, and cite the previous and current secretaries of state for Northern Ireland in saying that a referendum is not on the cards.

<sup>11</sup> Resolution 47 (1948) [adopted by the Security Council at its 286th meeting] of 21 April 1948.

<sup>12</sup> See Garret FitzGerald, 'How Ireland punched above its weight at UN Security Council', 11 July 2009, available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/how-ireland-punched-above-its-weight-at-un-security-council-1.697726> (7 March 2021).

<sup>13</sup> Northern Ireland Act, Sch. 1 amended (16.2.2001) by 2000 c. 41, s. 102 (with s. 156(6)); S.I. 2001/222, art. 2, Sch. 1 Pt. I.

Speaking in October 2019, the then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Julian Smith, said that he was not at all considering the question of a referendum and that ‘the Union was strong’ (BBC, *The View*, 2019). His successor Brandon Lewis has also refused to be drawn on the details of when a UK government would trigger a referendum both at the time of his appointment and since, in response to a question in the Commons.<sup>14</sup>

The crucial question, of course, is when it ‘appears likely’ that ‘a majority of those voting would express a wish that Northern Ireland’ join the Republic of Ireland. In the report, the authors cite survey evidence to the effect that there has been a surge in support for unification. Thus:

Until around 2013, almost all studies found support for unification to be below 30%. Since then, results have become much more varied. While some studies continue to suggest little or no change, a small number since 2017 have placed support for unification at or close to 50%.<sup>15</sup>

The authors spend considerable time discussing what they call ‘the mandatory duty’ to hold a referendum.<sup>16</sup> But, once again, the report’s authors are admirably clear that the duty to call a poll is not based on solid legal ground. In their words, “Likely” is not a term with a specific legal meaning. In this context, it can be presumed to mean simply “more probable than not”.<sup>17</sup>

True, a High Court Judge opined in *Re McCord*, that

If the evidence leads the Secretary of State to believe that the majority would so vote then she has no choice but to call a border poll. It is necessarily implied in this provision that the Secretary of State must honestly reflect on the evidence available to her to see whether it leads her to the conclusion that the majority would be likely to vote in favour of a united Ireland. Evidence of

<sup>14</sup> Julian Smith and Brendan Lewis quoted in *Interim Report*, 38.

<sup>15</sup> *Interim Report*, 42.

<sup>16</sup> *Interim Report*, 108.

<sup>17</sup> *Interim Report*, 114.



election results and opinion polls may form part of the evidential context in which to exercise the judgment whether it appears to the Secretary of State that there is likely to be a majority for a united Ireland.<sup>18</sup>

In the report the authors spend a fair bit of energy on analysing what might be meant by ‘evidence of election results’ and ‘opinion polls’. This seems at best optimistic, and at worst borders on naïveté.

It is legally possible that this *obiter dicta* from *Re McCord* has legal force. But it is unlikely to matter given the current political circumstances. The Conservative and Unionist Party in its manifesto before the General Election in the United Kingdom in 2019 stated that, it would ‘never be neutral on the Union and why we stand for a proud, confident, inclusive and modern unionism that affords equal respect to all traditions and parts of the community’.<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, this government is one which by its own admission is willing to ‘break international law in a very specific and limited way’—as expressed by the current secretary of state for Northern Ireland.<sup>20</sup> Legally reprehensible and politically irresponsible though such statements are, the idea that the present administration would abide by anything as flimsy as the spirit of a two-decade old agreement, even *obiter* in a judicial review case, seems far-fetched, and the report does not quite acknowledge this.

## REFERENDUM REGULATION

The *Interim Report* stays on firmer ground when it deals with referendums. The section on the franchise is comprehensive and based on solid evidence from other jurisdictions, as well as soft law references from the Venice Commission’s recommendations regarding the conduct of referendums.<sup>21</sup>

Limiting the franchise—or extending it—is the oldest trick in the proverbial book for altering referendum outcomes, and it is prudent to devote space to

<sup>18</sup> *Re McCord* [2018] NIQB 106, para 20, per Girvin.

<sup>19</sup> Conservative and Unionist Party, ‘Conservative Manifesto 2019: Get Brexit done and unleash Britain’s potential’ (London, 2019), 44.

<sup>20</sup> Brendan Lewis, MP in House of Commons Debates, Volume 679, Tuesday 8 September 2020, Col. 509.

<sup>21</sup> For the most recent update (completed after the *Interim Report* was published see: CDL-AD(2020)031-e Revised guidelines on the holding of referendums—Approved by the Council of Democratic Elections at its 69th online meeting (7 October 2020) and adopted by the Venice Commission at its 124th online Plenary Session (8–9 October 2020).

this issue, even though the conclusion, ‘the “ordinary” franchise rules should apply’, seems a tad tame.<sup>22</sup>

The report is also on solid ground when it deals with the matter of special majority requirements. In some cases, a vote for independence has required more than a simple majority. For example, in 2006, it was a stipulation that independence for Montenegro would require the support of 55 percent of those voting, and in 2011 there was a 60 percent turnout requirement, in the referendum in South Sudan. The commission is against a similar measure in Northern Ireland, ‘Any qualified majority threshold would make it harder to change the status quo and would therefore favour the status quo. On the basic, binary question of sovereignty, that could not be justified’.<sup>23</sup> From a legal point of view, this is in accordance with the Northern Ireland Act 1998, which states (Section 1.2) the determining factor in a future border poll is ‘the wish expressed by a majority and the Government of Ireland’. But the position is also in line with the norm in most referendums on reunification. Of the 27 referendums on reunification that have taken place from Saarland in Germany through to Sylhet in present-day Bangladesh, the referendums were decided by a simple 50-percent-plus-one basis. The only exception to the rule was the two-round referendum in Newfoundland in 1948 on whether to join Canada. The reasoning in this section is clear, legally convincing and based on a solid review of the precedents.

As the reader of the *Interim Report* will have noticed, this is not a revolutionary report. That is a compliment to its authors. Referendums are contentious, and to find common ground is no mean feat on an issue that has led to the loss of thousands of people’s lives.

One of the strengths of this report is that the authors are willing to depart from principle. To arrive at viable and appropriate regulations is not an abstract exercise. ‘In law everything is context’, a British judge famously noted.<sup>24</sup>

This principle is also true for political theory, and indeed, for practical politics. At the theoretical level, the late John Rawls spoke of the need to find a ‘reflective equilibrium’ between ideals and gut-feeling. That is, we may well revise our ‘judgments to conform to its principles even though the theory

<sup>22</sup> *Interim Report*, 182.

<sup>23</sup> *Interim Report*, 173.

<sup>24</sup> *R (on the application of ProLife Alliance) v. British Broadcasting Corporation*, 2003, UKHL 23, per Lord Steyn.

does not fit...existing judgments exactly...but rather the one which matches... judgments in reflective equilibrium'.<sup>25</sup>

The same pragmatic approach (without the 'wonkish' reference to political theory) seems to have been used in this report. The report sets out the different levels of regulation of campaign finance in the two jurisdictions. In Ireland there are few limits on how much money can be spent in referendum campaigns, whereas in the United Kingdom the Political Parties, Elections and Referendum Act 1999 (Generally known as PPERA) contains strict limits on campaign spending. Under this act, the Electoral Commission selects two 'designated' umbrella groups who represent the two sides of the argument.

While the report seems sympathetic to the rationale behind the UK act, it finds upon reflection that this arrangement is unlikely to be suitable for Northern Ireland. As they write:

The system supposes that a single organisation can reasonably represent the broad range of perspectives on each side of the referendum debate. That might be difficult in the case of a unification referendum in Northern Ireland, and it might therefore be desirable to modify the system or set it aside for such a vote. It would be advisable to make such a change, however, only through wide consultation and seeking consensus.<sup>26</sup>

This seems a reasonable conclusion, and one that adds credence to the neutrality of the report. And, as a further sign of their fair-minded approach, there is also criticism of the lack of regulation of campaign finance in Ireland. The report duly acknowledges that:

In Ireland, the *Standards in Public Office Commission* has argued for limits on campaign spending and better controls on overseas spending, as well as for improved transparency of donations...[And that] The Citizens' Assembly of 2016–18 similarly recommended that there should be regulation of spending, with 98% of members supporting overall spending limits in campaigns. It added that anonymous donations should be banned and that there should be public funding of each side of a referendum to an equal degree.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> John Rawls, *A theory of justice* (revised edn, Cambridge MA, 1999), 42–43.

<sup>26</sup> *Interim Report*, 200.

<sup>27</sup> *Interim Report*, 200.

## ONLINE CAMPAIGNING

One issue that has been strangely left out of the report is the regulation of online campaigning. In recent years, some of the most momentous electoral upsets have been a result of the use of internet campaigning. In the words of a recent study by this author and colleagues, it was noted that, ‘the innovative genius of the Trump Campaign was to use data harvesting to individually target voters (a practice known as micro targeting)’.<sup>28</sup>

That this issue is left out is also rather odd as the topic of online campaigning was highlighted in Irish Standards in Public Office Commission, in the report issues in 2017. In this, concern was expressed that ‘Facebook campaigns are not regulated by this legislation—meaning individuals or groups from anywhere can pay for Facebook advertising targeting certain demographics of Irish voters’.<sup>29</sup> While there is a reference to social media companies voluntarily banning foreign commercials in Irish referendums,<sup>30</sup> much more could have been written about the restrictions on online campaigning that have been introduced in other European countries, including Estonia, Latvia, Iceland and Portugal.

As this is a crucially important issue, it is worth looking at the regulations in these countries at some length.

As far back as 2008, the Parliament of Estonia introduced the Advertising Act, which bans political advertising on the internet, including ‘subliminal techniques’.<sup>31</sup> This regulation has been updated yearly since its promulgation.

While comprehensive, the Estonian legislation pertaining to online advertising is less detailed than in Latvia. In this country, the Law on National Referendum, Legislative Initiative and European Citizens’ Initiative has been continuously updated to take into account new developments in online advertising.<sup>32</sup> Thus, Chapter VI of the Act provides a ban on ‘hidden campaigning’, and explicitly cites advertising on the ‘Internet’; ‘Hidden campaigning before

<sup>28</sup> This issue is dealt with at length in Lucy Atkinson, Andrew Blick, and Matt Qvortrup, *The referendum in Britain: a history* (Oxford, 2020), 198.

<sup>29</sup> ‘How many foreign groups are buying Facebook ads as part of the abortion referendum debate?’ *Journal.ie*, 25 March 2018. Available at: <https://www.thejournal.ie/kanto-vote-referendum-3914073-Mar2018/> (20 January 2021).

<sup>30</sup> *Interim Report*, 204.

<sup>31</sup> Advertising Act, 12.03.2008, ‘Riigi Teataja’ I 2008, 15, 108, Art. 11.

<sup>32</sup> *Latvijas Vēstnesis [Latvian Journal of Law]*, 47 (178), 20.04.1994.

a national referendum, hidden campaigning for a legislative initiative or hidden campaigning for the initiative to revoke the *Saeima* is prohibited'.<sup>33</sup>

This type of regulation is not just known in the Baltic countries. Some countries in Western Europe have similarly sought to regulate online campaigning. One of these is Iceland. Until the financial collapse of the island nation's economy in 2008, there had been no nationwide referendums since 1944 when the country voted to sever ties with Denmark. However, as a consequence of the political crisis and massive debt caused by the bankruptcy of the IceSave and Kaupthing banks, the Icelandic president took the unusual and unprecedented step of vetoing the agreement the government had made with the country's international creditors.<sup>34</sup> This resulted in two referendums, in 2010 and 2011, in which the government's plans were rejected by over 90 percent of the voters. Following this referendum, the voters approved six amendments to the constitution in a non-binding referendum in 2012.<sup>35</sup> This upsurge in the use of the referendum in Iceland was accompanied by a detailed set of regulations of online campaigning. While not as comprehensive as that of the Baltic states, the Icelandic government recently implemented a law on online anonymous campaigning. Political bodies are now prohibited from financing or taking part in the publishing of any campaign-related material without making their affiliation public.<sup>36</sup>

In Portugal, similar legislation pertaining to the use of the internet is subject to the same regulations as in other media. According to the Portuguese legislation, the social media must ensure, 'balance, representativeness, and equity in the treatment of news, reporting of facts or events of informative value'.<sup>37</sup> Thus, 'In the use of the Internet, the media [must] observe, with due adaptations, the same rules to which they are obliged by this law, in relation to the other means of communication'. Thus, while all actors 'shall at all times enjoy full freedom of use of social networks and other means of expression through the Internet', there are limits. For example, it is illegal to use these media, 'for the dissemination of campaign content on election days eve (reflexion day)',

<sup>33</sup> Advertising Act 2008 Art 31 (3).

<sup>34</sup> K.A. Curtis, J. Jupille and D. Leblang, 'Iceland on the rocks: the mass political economy of sovereign debt resettlement', *International Organization* 68 (3) (2014), 721–40.

<sup>35</sup> See: Tom Dobber, Ronan Ó Fathaigh and Frederik J. Zuiderveen Borgesius, 'The regulation of online political micro-targeting in Europe', *Internet Policy Review* 8 (4) (2019). <https://doi.org/10.14763/2019.4.1440>.

<sup>36</sup> These examples are further discussed in Matt Qvortrup, *Democracy on demand: holding power to account* (Manchester, 2021).

<sup>37</sup> Lei n.º 72-A/2015, Art. 6.

and there is a ban on ‘the use of commercial advertising’.<sup>38</sup> In cases of violation of these regulations, there is a sanctioning regime, according to which breach of rules pertaining to commercial advertising may result in fines of between €15,000 and €75,000.<sup>39</sup>

It is difficult to see why similar regulations could not be introduced in Ireland and in the United Kingdom in future referendums on unification of the two jurisdictions on the island of Ireland.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Referendums are contentious, and sometimes democratic theory has not taken this fully into account. In 1915, when Irish independence was not seen as a realistic prospect by many in Britain, the English historian Arnold Toynbee—an enthusiast for referendums to settle national and ethnic issues—opined that, ‘if the plebiscite decides for separatism, there is no more to be said about the political question’.<sup>40</sup>

The Border Poll in 1973, and other referendums, have shown that referendums in general, and those involving issues of ethnic and national politics in particular, can lead to what some scholars called ‘an anarchy of referendums’.<sup>41</sup> Reflecting on the abuse of referendums that took place in the early 1990s, a British political scientist and pundit concluded that ‘referendums cannot be used for this’ (settling of ethnic and territorial disputes).<sup>42</sup>

This thoroughly researched report proves that individual wrong. This is a good primer for anyone contemplating a referendum, and anyone interested in the topic must read it. Yet, the authors are uncharacteristically modest, writing in the conclusion: ‘This is an interim version of our report. We are publishing it now because we would like to hear others’ thoughts on our draft analysis and draft conclusions. We claim no monopoly of wisdom, and we look forward to feed-back on our interim findings’.<sup>43</sup>

Democracy is about finding compromises, and this report with its open and transparent account is a fine example of consensus democracy

<sup>38</sup> Lei n.º 72-A/2015, Art. 11.

<sup>39</sup> Lei n.º 72-A/2015, Art. 12.

<sup>40</sup> Arnold Toynbee, *Nationality and the War* (London, 1915), 251.

<sup>41</sup> H.E. Brady and C.S. Kaplan, *Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union*, David Butler and Austin Ranney (eds), *Referendums around the world: the growing use of direct democracy* (London, 1994), 174–217: 206.

<sup>42</sup> Vernon Bogdanor, *Politics and the constitution* (Dartmouth: Aldershot, 1996) 5.

<sup>43</sup> *Interim Report*, 216.

in practice. As such the report is written in the spirit of the Good Friday Agreement. One must hope that the politicians (and the voters) will be animated by this spirit when (or if) they are called upon to vote in a referendum on Irish unification.

Read a Response by Eileen Connolly,  
'The Rules for Holding Referendums on Irish Unity',  
<https://doi.org/10.3318/ISIA.2021.32b.17>